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EPIPSYCHIDION

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· EPIPSYCHIDION ·

BY

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

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*A TYPE FAC-SIMILE REPRINT OF THE ORIGINAL
EDITION FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1821*

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

THE REV. STOPFORD A. BROOKE, M.A.

AND A NOTE BY

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

EDITED BY

ROBERT ALFRED POTTS



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REPRINT OF *Epipsychidion*

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

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THE noble and unfortunate Lady Emilia V——, to whom this poem was addressed, was the elder of two daughters, by his first wife, of a Count Viviani, head of one of the most ancient families in Pisa. Her father in his old age took unto himself a wife not much older than either of the daughters. This lady, whose beauty did not equal that of the Count's children, was naturally jealous of their charms, and deemed them dangerous rivals in the eyes of her Cavaliere; she therefore exerted all her influence over her infatuated husband, and persuaded him, under pretence of completing their education, to place them each in a separate convent. Teresa Emilia, the eldest, had now been confined for two years in the Convent of St. Anna. Her father desired to see her married, but sought a husband for her who would take her off his hands without a dowry. Pacchiani, the friend and confessor to the family, and tutor to the children, made the Contessinas frequent subjects of his conversation

with the Shelleys, and spoke most enthusiastically of the beauty and accomplishments of Emilia. "Poverina," he said, "she pines like a bird in a cage—ardently longs to escape from her prison-house—pines with *ennui*, and wanders about the corridors like an unquiet spirit; she sees her young days glide on without an aim or purpose. She was made for love. . . . A miserable place is that Convent of St. Anna," he added, "and if you had seen, as I have done, the poor *pensionnaires* shut up in that narrow, suffocating street in the summer (for it does not possess a garden), and in the winter, as now, shivering with cold, being allowed nothing to warm them but a few ashes, which they carry about in an earthen vase, you would pity them."

This little story deeply interested Shelley, and induced him to visit the captive some time in December, 1820.

The Convent of St. Anna, a ruinous building, was situated in an unfrequented street in the suburbs, not far from the walls.

"After passing through a gloomy portal that led to a quadrangle, the area of which was crowded with crosses, memorials of old monastic times," writes Medwin, "we were in the presence of Emilia. . . . Emilia was indeed lovely and interesting. Her profuse black hair, tied in the most simple knot, after the manner of a

Greek Muse in the Florence Gallery, displayed to its full height her brow, fair as that of the marble of which I speak. She was also of about the same height as the antique. Her features possessed a rare faultlessness, and almost Grecian contour, the nose and forehead making a straight line. . . . Her eyes had the sleepy voluptuousness, if not the colour, of Beatrice Cenci's. They had, indeed, no definite colour, changing with the changing feeling to dark or light, as the soul animated them. Her cheek was pale, too, as marble, owing to her confinement and want of air, and perhaps to 'thought.'" Mrs. Shelley gave a very similar description of Emilia, under the name of Clorinda, in her novel of *Lodore*.

It is hardly necessary to quote the further description of her as it is given at length in Dowden's *Life of Shelley*; it only remains to state that the almost infatuated admiration of the idol declined almost as rapidly as it arose, to judge from Shelley's letter on the subject—that to Mr. Gisborne in June, 1822. Emilia married Biondi in 1822, and, according to the poet, led her husband and his mother "a devil of a life." She was seen by Medwin some years after her ill-starred wedding: as she lay on her couch and extended a thin hand, she was so changed that the visitor could hardly find a trace of her former beauty. Not long after this interview, poisoned by

the malaria of the Maremma, and broken in heart and hope, Emilia died.

It may be of interest to print here a portion of Shelley's letter to Mr. Ollier, as regards the *Epipsy-chidion*:

"PISA, February 16th, 1821.

"DEAR SIR,

"I send you three poems—*Ode to Naples*, a sonnet, and a longer piece, entitled *Epipsy-chidion*. The two former are my own; and you will be so obliging as to take the first opportunity of publishing according to your own discretion.

"The longer poem I desire should not be considered as my own; indeed, in a certain sense, it is a production of a portion of me already dead; and in this sense the advertisement is no fiction. It is to be published simply for the esoteric few; and I make its author a secret, to avoid the malignity of those who turn sweet food into poison; transforming all they touch into the corruption of their own natures. My wish with respect to it is, that it should be printed immediately in the simplest form, and merely one hundred copies: those who are capable of judging and feeling rightly with respect to a composition of so abstruse a nature, certainly do not arrive at that number—among those, at least, who would

ever be excited to read an obscure and anonymous production; and it would give me no pleasure that the vulgar should read it. If you have any bookselling reason against publishing so small a number as a hundred, merely, distribute copies among those to whom you think the poetry would afford any pleasure, and send me, as soon as you can, a copy by the post. I have written it so as to give very little trouble, I hope, to the printer, or to the person who revises. I would be much obliged to you if you would take this office on yourself.

.

"I remain, dear Sir,

"Your very obedient servant,

"PERCY B. SHELLEY."

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

EPIPSYCHIDION/verses addressed to the noble/and unfortunate lady/EMILIA V——/now imprisoned in the convent of ——/L'anima amante si slancia fuori del creato, e si crea nel infinito/un Mondo tutto per essa, diverso assai da questo oscuro e pauroso/baratro. Her own words. London. C and J Ollier Vere Street Bond Street/MDCCCXXI.

Half-title, with imprint on verso. London/printed by S. and R. Bentley, Dorset-Street,/Salisbury-Square./title, advertisement, with lines "My Song," &c., on verso; and text pp. 7-31. The imprint, differently worded, is repeated on the reverse of p. 31. London/printed by S & R Bentley/Dorset Street/MDCCCXXI.

The book was issued as a "stabbed pamphlet," without wrapper, and the exact measurement of an uncut copy is $8\frac{7}{8} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

The only separate reprint of *Epipsychidion* as yet produced is a thin octavo volume, edited by Mr. H. Buxton Forman, and issued by him in 1876 for private circulation only. Details of the book will be found in the *Shelley Library*, 1886, pp. 101 and 102.

R. A. POTTS.

INTRODUCTION





INTRODUCTION.

THE charm which belongs to Shelley, and the delight which a great poem kindles in the heart of man, have made Emilia Viviani, to whom the *Epipsychidion* was written, one of the interesting women of the world. In herself she does not deserve this great interest. She was intelligent, passionate, beautiful, unhappy, capable of small literature; but of this type of women there are thousands in all classes of society of whom the world has never heard. But when Shelley idealized her, she became a personage, and all who loved Shelley made her a wonder.

Medwin described her as one might describe a Greek Muse. Mrs. Shelley wrote a long description of her to Leigh Hunt, and painted her and her character under the name of Clorinda, in her novel of *Lodore*. Claire fell in love with her. Shelley, enthralled by her solitary and sorrowful position, thinking of her as the victim of oppression and taken for a time with her beauty, mingled

her up with the ideal of Beauty he had created, partly from Plato, partly from his own thought; and yet, even while he was with her, forgot the woman in the vision which she enabled him to spin out of his own imagination. When he had expressed this vision in the form of his poem, he left it behind him, and with it he left Emilia. And when he ceased to idealize her, his charm ceased to accompany her, and the rest of his circle hesitated no longer to see her in the rigid light of day. But this has not been the case with those who care for poetry. As long as *Epipsy-chidion* is read, Emilia Viviani will be a romantic figure. She may have become prosaic to Shelley, as she did; Mary Shelley may have mocked at her and at Shelley's Platonics, but she is still alive in the world of the imagination of man, and so much alive that we are even angry when the veil of the common-place is thrown over her. Indeed, her tragic fate will always restore her to her poetic place. She for whom the Ionian isle had been pictured as a dwelling and perfect love as her joy, died, broken-hearted, poisoned by the deadly breath of the Maremma. And, as if she could not be kept out of the poetic atmosphere, we cannot help thinking of one, as fair, perhaps as unwise, who also perished in Maremma, though it may be of the dagger, not of the pestilence, and whom Dante has made alive for ever—

“Ricordati di me, che son la Pia;
Siena mi fe, disfecemi Maremma.”

We keep her then, and we do so rightly, in the element of Shelley's poem, but if ever we wish to balance our impression, and to clearly understand that the woman and the poem belong to the ideal and not to the actual, we may take up Shelley's letters. Every one knows what he said afterwards of *Epipsychidion* and its subject. But the words which follow were written before he wrote the poem, and are cold and judicial.

"I see Emily sometimes, and whether her presence is the source of pain or pleasure to me, I am equally ill-fated in both. I am deeply interested in her destiny, and the interest can in no manner influence it. She is not however insensible to my sympathy, and she counts it among her alleviations. As much comfort as she receives from my attachment to her, I lose. There is no reason that you should fear any mixture of that which you call *Love*. My conception of Emilia's talents augments every day. Her moral nature is fine, but not above circumstances, yet I think her tender and true, which is always something. How many are only one of these things at a time."—Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii., p. 389.

That is quite enough. It has not the touch of any real passion. It was written, if Mr. Dowden's date be not a conjecture, about a month before he began the *Epipsychidion*. During that month he saw Emilia continually; her affection for him increased, and his for her; and when he wrote the poem, he felt differently. Much of what he said was mixed,

consciously or unconsciously, with some love for the woman herself, for one who was the mortal image of the ideal creature whom he loved beyond the phenomenal world. And this love, rising through the intellectual imagery, and setting it on fire, redeems the poem from the coldness of a mere philosophy of love, and makes it passionate. It was the same, I think, in the *Vita Nuova*. Dante writes of the absolute Love, and the Wisdom which is at one with Love, and he represents this under the form of Beatrice. But he also writes—borne away by a real love—of Beatrice herself alone; and then again, seems to write of both together, as if the earthly and the heavenly passion were wrought into one. In *Epipsychidion* a similar thing takes place. Shelley sometimes speaks of Emilia as of a woman towards whom he feels love, and sometimes only of his *Epipsychidion*—the divine image of his soul, whom he feels through her, and who is veiled in her. The phrases change from being personal and passionate, to being impersonal and passionate. The image and the thing imaged are frequently fused into one. Emilia and the “Soul out of his soul” are clasped together, like two hands, in the verse. But this is chiefly in the beginning of the poem. As he warms in his effort Emilia is neglected. She has done her work. He has ascended, through her, to the divine mistress of the world of his own thoughts—the spirit whom he describes in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, whom he had longed for and pursued after all his

life long, but whom he had never grasped. Emilia is but the passing shadow of this substance. For a moment, in the rush of his song and his thought, he seems to seize the substance at the end of the poem. But the effort is too great. He falls back from that high region with a broken wing. "Woe is me," he cries—and he never tried to reach it again. *Epipsychidion* is the last shape into which his idealism of Love was thrown. The greatness of the failure, following on the greatness of the effort, made him put this kind of thing away for ever. When he spoke afterwards of the poem, he said—"It is a part of me which is already dead." And all the love poems which follow *Epipsychidion*, are in the real world, without a trace of philosophy, inspired only by personal affection.

I have said that there was a personal element in this poem, that Shelley had some feeling for Emilia herself. But there was another element of personality in it different from that which had to do with Emilia. He infused a personality into the ideal Beauty to which he aspired to unite himself. Plato did not impersonate his idea of Beauty, but Shelley did this thing. He was forced by his nature to realise the idea in some form, and to realise it as belonging especially to himself. Hence he created an *Epipsychidion*—"a soul out of his soul"—a heightened, externalised personality of himself, conceived as perfect; an ideal image of his own being; different in sex; his complement; originally part of him,

now separated from him; after whom he pursued; whom he felt in all that was calm and sublime and lovely in knowledge, in nature, and in woman; and to absolute union with whom, such union as is described in the latter half of *Epipsychidion*, he passionately aspired. And this being, since she was the essence of all the loveliness which he could conceive or feel, represented also to him and for him—ideal Beauty. This creation was not Platonic—Plato spoke only of the Idea of Beauty. This was an invention of Shelley's, an addition, to satisfy his cry for personality, to the Platonic theory of love. He expresses it fully enough in his essay on Love; and it reaches its extreme of mingled ideality and personality in the poem of *Epipsychidion*.

The history of the development of this conception is written in his poetry. In the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, he conceives of the Archetypal Beauty, the beauty which is the model and source of all beautiful forms, much as Plato might have conceived of it. It is not personal at all. It is a pervading spirit, whose shadow, but never whose substance, is seen. But this conception was soon changed. He wanted personality. He embodied this archetype in a feminine being, existing in the super-phenomenal world, glimpses of whom he saw at times, and she was the other half of his own soul. "Her voice," he says in *Alastor*,

"was like the voice of his own soul
Heard in the calm of Thought."

And if he could have been content with that—if he could have kept himself wholly to the ideal personality—it had been well. But he had not strength enough. He was always driven, by a weakness in his nature, to try and find her image in real women. His ideal love continually glided back into a desire of realising itself on earth; and yet, when he attempted to realise it in any woman, she fell, or earthly love itself fell, so far below the ideal image, that he was driven back again from the woman on earth to the ideal in his own soul. Thus smitten to and fro, he had no peace. He was, as he calls himself in *Adonais*, “a power girt round with weakness”—the creator of thoughts which afterwards pursued their creator as wolves pursue a deer.

Alastor records the coming of this vision and the agony of not being able to realise it. The poet, unable to be content with the love of abstract Beauty alone, unable to find it realised in any of its mortal images on earth; unable to live wholly in the super-sensuous world, unable to satisfy himself in the sensuous; beaten and tortured between these two inabilities, dies of the pain of the struggle.

Prince Athanase, as we discover from the commentary, would have recorded, perhaps step by step, the vicissitudes of this pursuit. A number of other poems contain allusions to this conception which, from his long brooding on it, had become one of the roots of Shelley's life and

✓ character. (*Epipsychidion* was its noblest, most triumphant, most complete expression, and in that expression of it, it perished.) In the poem he recapitulates the whole history of this idea in his soul. He describes, first, the being whom his spirit, in his youth, oft

“Met on its visioned wanderings, far aloft
In the clear golden prime of my youth’s dawn,”

whose voice came to him from Nature, history, romance, and high philosophy, whose spirit was the harmony of truth. This is the Spirit in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. Then he describes, in the lines which begin—

“Then from the caverns of my dreary youth”

—the vain search for her, repeating in this passage the motive of the story of *Alastor*. In the midst of this, we come upon that phase of the pursuit which is not contained in *Alastor*, but is contained in the notes to *Prince Athanase*—the meeting with that false image of pure Beauty which awakens sensual love, a phase which is treated of by Plato—

“There—one, whose voice was venom’d melody
Sate by a well, under blue nightshade bowers ;
The breath of her false mouth was like faint flowers ;
Her touch was as electric poison.”

And this lower love may be compared with that dwelt on in Shakspeare’s later Sonnets, to which Shelley, speaking of *Epipsychidion*, refers.

Having thus recapitulated his youthful experience in the pursuit of ideal Beauty, he next turns to show how he sought in mortal women, and in love of them, to find the shadow of this soul out of his soul—some image of the celestial substance of pure Beauty. He goes through these women, one after another, and represents them under various symbols. I have elsewhere made some conjectures with regard to the actual women whom he represents under these symbols, but no certainty can be arrived at concerning them. Only one thing is plain, Mary Godwin is the Moon of the passage, and it is clear from what he says that she did not completely satisfy his heart. But she only fails to satisfy him so far as she is of the earth, and not of the ideal region. He was quite content with her as long as he chose to live in the outward world. But for the supersensuous universe, and as a realisation of his spiritual bride, she was not enough. Then he meets Emilia; and in her, for a time, at his first contact with her, he seems to meet the actual image, the earthly form of the ideal Beauty whom he claims as the bride of his soul. In speaking of her, he mingles the ideal and the real together, the divine and the human. But as the poem goes on, the woman as a woman ceases to be palpable in his verse. There is no confusion then between the image of Emily and the thing imaged. (Emily as a woman has disappeared. There is nothing left but the vision of Beauty embodied

in his *Epipsychidion*, whom he seems at last to grasp, and whom he calls Emily. Sometimes a phrase of personal passion slips in, because of his "error of seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal," but from the moment he cries—

"The day is come, and thou wilt fly with me"—

he speaks only of the vision of his youth, of the personality of her who is his second soul or perhaps his very soul, of the substance of whom he only possesses a shadow; of the spiritual form of the pure and ideal Beauty which, in the supersensuous world, belongs to him; of her whose pressure on him from without is the source of all his ideals, all his aspiration; whom he feels speaking to him in all knowledge, love, nature, and thought. Emilia herself is but one step in the ladder by which he has attained the vision of union with this pure, personal, spiritual, shape of Beauty. It is with her, under the name of Emily, that he flies away into the life beyond phenomena. The description of the flight is entirely symbolical. The Ionian isle and all else are meant to be impalpable, images of an immaterial world. No keel, he declares, has ever ploughed the sea-path to that island. It is cradled between Heaven, Air, Earth, and Sea. No scourges that afflict the earth visit it. A soul burns in the heart of it, an atom of the Eternal. And the passionate description of his life there with Emily is not

a description of earthly passion. It is the description of Shelley at last united to that other far-off half of his being, and the incorporation of the two into one is as incorporeal as the rest. It is a description of the one ideal yearning of the soul towards Beauty, of the only true love which is felt in life (which but touches earthly women on its path as means towards its end), clasping at last its ideal in the immaterial world of pure Thought, and with the emotion of that Thought. But it is so far beyond that which is possible for man to realise continuously while he is shut in by mere phenomena, that having attained it for a moment, he breaks down, and falls exhausted from the height.

"Woe is me!

The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
 Into the heights of Love's rare universe
 Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.
 I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!"

The one true love of human life is then ideal, not in the world of the senses at all, and cannot be realised or satisfied by any thing or any one on earth. Its object, ideal Beauty, contains the substance of all the varied forms of beauty which we find in thought, in emotion, in nature, and in humanity. This Beauty is the one life in a million forms which are themselves its painted shadows. Hence, when we love man, woman, or any form of Nature, it is not these that primarily we love. We love the living

spirit of Beauty, of which each of them is one phase alone, and we love these, that we may pass beyond them to the spirit that they partially express. They are steps in a ladder by which we reach the perfect reality.

+ Hence arose a theory of personal human love which traverses the code of social morals, and that theory Shelley held. It was, that to bind ourselves down to one object of love alone was not wise, because then we rendered ourselves incapable of seeing and realising those different aspects of the ideal Beauty which we could find in other minds, in other personalities. When we limit our loves, we limit our capacity, so far, of grasping a full conception of Beauty. He introduces, logically enough, this view of his into the midst of *Epipsychidion*. Whether Mary liked that theory, whether it has any rightness in it at all, how far Shelley practised it, or refrained from putting it into practice, is not the question now. He held it in theory, and he places it here. He never was attached, he says, to that great sect

“ Whose doctrine is that each one should select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
To cold oblivion.”

Feeling immediately that it will be said that to love more than one person in this relation is to destroy love, he expands his theory by stating that love is of such a quality that it is not lost by being divided. The first object

of love is not less loved, but more loved, by the person who loves, when he gives love to other objects, to other persons. Love is like understanding which grows bright by gazing on many truths. Nay, if love is given to only one object, it builds for itself a grave. Again, when we divide the base things of life, suffering and dross, we may diminish them until they are consumed. But if we divide the nobler things, pleasure, and love, and thought, each part exceeds the whole, and we know not

“How much, while any yet remains unshared,
Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared,”

to man.

This is a theory capable of being used to promote licentiousness by those who have the sensual idea of love and beauty. By Shelley, who abhorred not only sensuality, but even claimed the world beyond the senses (the world of ideas), as the only real world, it could not be used in that manner. But it made him run counter to the code of morals which prevails in society in the question of his first wife. The moment he ceased to love Harriet Westbrook he considered himself as no longer married to her, and went away with a woman he did love. He never ceased to love Mary, and therefore he was always faithful to her. But he saw no reason whatever why he should not, while he was faithful to his marriage tie, give deep affection to other women, and find represented in them other phases

of the absolute Beauty, which phases he was bound to feel and gain through them. And this he did—though society necessarily condemned his action—with a conviction of his rightness. Emilia represented, and with astonishing force to him, one of these forms of the ideal Beauty, and enabled him, through his affection for her, to get nearer to realisation of it than he had ever done before. It is therefore quite natural that the statement of this theory should be as it were the centre piece of the poem.

I turn now to the poetical quality of the poem and to the characteristics of Shelley's work displayed in it.

It is an exceedingly personal poem, and contains almost all Shelley's weaknesses and powers, and both these at their height, because writing, and writing passionately, about his own inward life, he was under no such restraint as a subject apart from himself would naturally furnish. Here nothing that he thought seemed irrelevant, for the subject was his own thought.

He starts on his way like a stream at its first rush from its mountain source. The introduction is short, but ends with a phrase which shows how he chose, from the very beginning, to throw off all literary reticence—

“I weep vain tears, blood would less bitter be,
Yet poured forth gladlier, could it profit thee.”

And then we are afloat not on a river, but on a torrent, on whose swift and flashing surface, as we move, we have

scarcely time to breathe. This marks the whole poem. It is the most rapid of all his works. There is only one pause in it—just before the torrent changes into a deeper, quieter stream, but a stream even more swift than the torrent. The pause is where he stops to describe the theory of love which he held. That is, as it were, the portage in the midst of the descent of the river; the halt on the wayside before the race is taken up again, with the goal in sight.

He begins by a description of Emily, but far more a description of the image of Beauty he worshipped in the calm of his soul. The phrases change, as I said, from Emilia to the Beauty she shadows, and from that Beauty back again to her. The two are mingled as Form and Idea are mingled.

It was a constant artistic habit of his, when he had found a theme—and I use the word in its musical sense—a theme such as he finds in the lines—

“Seraph of Heaven—too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of woman
All that is insupportable in thee
Of Light and Love and Immortality”

—to vary that theme as long as he could, changing the key, and then following eagerly the new thoughts, with their correlative emotions, which were suggested by the change of key. He follows these wherever they lead him, no matter into what strange places; inspired, but with an

ungirdled inspiration. He did not retain, save rarely, that steady command over his materials, that power of choice and rejection over his imaginations which the greatest artists possess. In his eager movement of improvisation he frequently puts down every thought—and the thoughts are shaped in metaphors—which occurs to him, and too often trusts to accumulation rather than to choice to produce his effect. There are fine exceptions, the best of which is the *Ode to the West Wind*, but they are exceptions. Again, he is often forced, in order to get his thought into form before him, to shape it into a multitude of metaphors, each without connection with its companions, and at the end to find that he has failed to satisfy himself. The thought is *not* shaped. The greater poet, like Homer, would have chosen one comparison and done all he wanted with one. Three times Shelley, working in this way, returns to the charge at the beginning of this poem, and three times he records his failure.

The series of metaphors which call the Seraph of Heaven who is hidden in Emilia—

“ Sweet Benediction in the eternal Curse !
 Veiled Glory of this lampless Universe !
 Thou Moon beyond the clouds ! Thou living Form
 Among the Dead ! Thou Star above the Storm !
 Thou Wonder and thou Beauty and thou Terror !
 Thou Harmony of Nature’s art ! Thou Mirror
 In whom, as in the splendour of the Sun,
 All shapes look glorious which thou gazest on ! ”

—ten metaphors—end in his saying that his words are dim and obscure her, as they certainly do.

The next attempt to embody his thought, in a changed key, begins with

Sweet Lamp ; my moth-like Muse has burnt its wings,"

and ends, after thirteen metaphors, with another confession of failure—

"I measure
The world of fancies, seeking one like thee,
And find, alas, mine own infirmity."

By this time, however, Shelley, who always warmed while he wrote, his own music thrilling him into quicker creation (one of the marks of him as a great artist being that at the end of his poems he becomes a greater poet than at the beginning,—had risen into a higher region, and the beat of his wing in it is stronger now and nobler than before. Again he renews his attempt to shape his thought, and he almost succeeds.

"She met me, stranger, upon life's rough way"—

so he begins, and the series of similes with which he indicates that glory of the Being of beauty which shines through Emilia's mortal shape—ended by a rapid rush of metaphors, here at last linked together with some unity by his spiritual passion—is a splendid series, containing

two magnificent descriptions of aspects of the sky, thrown off in the quick rush of verse for mere enrichment of his thought.

The whole passage has the quality of great music, and its fault, if I may call it a fault, is that it is done in the manner of music, and the manner of music is not the manner of poetry. Yet the higher he soars, and the more noble his flight (and this is extremely characteristic of Shelley as an artist), the more he feels that he is not master of his own passion; that he cannot grasp the fiery bird of his own thought and bid it stay for definition. He cries at the end—

" Ah ! woe is me !

What have I dared ? Where am I lifted ? How
Shall I descend and perish not ? "

And this, which I have described, applies not only to this beginning, but to the whole poem. Even after the extraordinary ease, rapidity, and sustained loveliness of the last part, after its noble and breathless climax, he feels that he has not realised his conception, is most conscious of his weakness when he is most master of his power. " Woe is me "—he takes up the phrase again—

"The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
Into the height of Love's rare Universe
Are chains of lead around its flight of fire—
I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire ! "

Yes, this is one of the marks of the man, and well he knew it.

"His head was bound with pansies *overblown*."¹

It is easy to heap critical blame on Shelley for this. Any fool is capable of that, and many have had that capability. But if we could take away this weakness we should not have Shelley any longer, but some one else, and the distinction he has among the poets would be lost. For to

¹ It may be that I have dwelt a little too much on this confession of weakness, and I certainly should not have done so if it had occurred only in this poem, which is not only personal but philosophical. But it appears again and again in poems which are wholly personal—at the end of the *Ode to the West Wind*, in the portrait he draws of himself in the *Adonais*. Want of power to keep the heights he could gain was felt by Shelley himself to be one of his characteristics.

Otherwise, I should have not made so much of it in this place; because this swooning as it were of the mind when it is brought face to face with absolute Beauty, and is therefore thrilled with the absolute Love, is common to all the mediæval poets who wrote about Love, and is described by them literally and allegorically. Even in the *Convito*, which Shelley may have had in his memory, and where Dante, in his later years, wrote distinctly of his Lady as signifying Philosophy—the most beautiful and excellent daughter of the Ruler of the Universe—we find the Poet making the same confession as Shelley made. He describes at the end of the third chapter of the third Treatise how powerless language is to express what the intellect (*intelletto*) sees.

"E dico che li miei pensieri, che sono parlar d'amore, sono di lei; che la mia anima, cioè 'l mio affetto, arde di potere ciò con la lingua narrare. E perchè dire nol posso, dico che l'anima se ne lamenta dicendo: '*Lassa, ch'io non son possente*.' E questa è l'altra ineffabilità; cioè, che la lingua non è di quello che lo 'ntelletto vede compiutamente seguate."

This only corresponds with that failure of words, of which Shelley speaks, to express Thought. But Dante's mind was too mighty to lose its power over itself. It is only at the sight of the eternal light of Deity—only after he has drawn nearer to expression of the ineffable than we can conceive possible to man, that he cries

"All' alta fantasia quì manco possa!"

take away the weakness would be to take away also the powers of which the weakness was an extreme. He fell exhausted, but it was because he soared so high; he trembled like a leaf, but it was because he was of such a nature that he could feel the more delicate secrets of the Universe.

And the question to ask is not—"Why was he so weak?" but—"Is there any other poet who could soar in this skylark fashion, and into these fine ethereal regions?" and "Is it possible to soar into them in any other way?" There are tenderer regions no doubt than these, wiser also, and more practical regions—more practical for comfort and teaching to men, for sweet and helpful thought, for feeling that inspires and heals—higher regions where the more majestic imaginations dwell, like the gods, in valleys of calm and joy—and into these Shelley did not soar. But his nature did not take him there. Where his nature did take him was a region into which no one else takes us, and where it is well we should sometimes travel—or, if it be said it is not well, where a good number of us wish to be taken. There is no one else but Shelley to bring us into that far dim country. This is a part of his distinctiveness and his distinction; and it is a great thing for us. And the solemn persons who do not wish to come, but stay only among the other regions of poetry, need not grudge us our charioteer, nor our course in the æther with him.

Next, I wish to draw attention to another poetic power Shelley possessed, and which is well illustrated in the *Epipsychidion*. It is his power of realising and describing landscapes which are wholly ideal. They do not belong to Nature, nor do they imitate her. They are no more records of what has been actually seen with the eyes than are the landscapes of Burne-Jones. Like him, Shelley invented his landscape for his subject, and it is intended to be remote from reality.

When, describing how the voice of the spirit of Beauty came to him in solitudes, he speaks of the fountains and the odours of flowers, the breeze and the rain, he does what another man could do. But when he creates the country of the following lines, which is dreamland, and yet which we see and feel, he does what no other poet but Shelley has ever done. He meets the spirit of Beauty

“In the clear golden prime of my youth’s dawn
Upon the fairy isles of sunny lawn,
Amid the enchanted mountains, and the caves
Of divine sleep, and on the air-like waves
Of wonder-level dream, whose tremulous floor
Paved her light steps ;—on an imagined shore,
Under the grey beak of some promontory
She met me, robed in such exceeding glory
That I beheld her not.”

How unlike Nature—yet how clear! How ethereal, yet how vivid in his imagination! It is indefinite yet definite enough to see. And where it is most definite—

"under the grey beak of some promontory"—it is made most ideal by the supernatural touch at the end, which transfers the whole to the region of the finest-woven thought,—“robed in such exceeding glory that I beheld her not”—a phrase which throws its ideality back on all that has preceded it, and makes the landscape even more ethereal.

Still more out of the world does his description become when he pictures himself as leaving this imagined land, and springing, “sandalled with plumes of fire,” into pure space to find his ideal. Yet, though he is in an unseen, unimagined void, the vision that he sees is definite. He beholds himself flitting here and there, and then—

“She, whom prayers or tears then could not tame,
Past, like a God throned on a wingèd planet,
Whose burning plumes to tenfold swiftness fan it,
Into the dreary cone of our life’s shade.”

What impersonation ! Clearness of vision midst of the visionary !

And now a new imagery comes into the poem. The whole landscape changes to fit a new mood of mind. Unity of impression is neglected for the sake of incessant altering of the mood, and with each mood the scenery alters. He has seen a momentary vision of the perfect Beauty, but has been unable to pursue it. The whole universe mocks his endeavour, and he goes into the

wintry forest which represents life after youth's ideal has been broken. Another poet would not have carried further the metaphor of the forest. Shelley, on the contrary, invents a whole scenery for the wood; realises it, as if it were an actual forest. It is a thorny place, through which he stumbles, and great trees fill it and grow on the grey earth. Strange plants and strange beasts are in it, and untaught foresters. It is there he meets by a well, under nightshade bowers, the image of sensual love. When he is deceived by his first hope, and stays his footsteps, he seems changed into a deer hunted by his own thoughts.¹ On the path, then, one stands like the Moon descended to Endymion, and leads him into a deep cave in the wild place, where he falls asleep; and Death and Life flit through the cave, like wingless boys, crying "Away, he is not of our crew"—that is, not of the life nor of the death which rule the actual world. At last, he is awaked from sleep, from a sleep which is a sleep in a dream, and which, in the dream, has its own dreams, by Emily coming through the wood which springs into life before her, passing from naked winter to soft summer.

The imagery then changes again, and he paints himself as a great earth, a world of love, with fruits and flowers,

¹ He repeats the thought in the *Adonais*;—

"And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey."
f

billows, mists and storms and skies, ruled by twin spheres of light, by moon and sun, by Mary and by Emily—each embodying for him phases and powers of the Absolute Beauty. Let others also come, he cries, and add their powers, and be other shapes of Beauty whom also I may love.

We read all this vaguely, and with vague pleasure. It is too changing, too indefinite in thought to give a high intellectual pleasure, and it is too far removed into a world of fancy to awaken personal passion, or to interest us by its emotion. But the curious thing is, that if we try to see the landscape or the images that move through it—both landscape and images, though they are only symbolic, are really definite. The places can be seen, described—could be painted. Shelley has looked upon them, and put down clearly what he saw. This is creation, and a kind of it which we do not meet in the work of other poets. We may call it useless, but it gives us pleasure. We also see it as Shelley saw it. But if there had been more passion in it, if the thought desired to be expressed had been more intense in Shelley's mind, the creation would have been still clearer—would not have been so mixed with foreign matter. The symbols used would not then change so often, the vision would be more at unity with itself. Our pleasure would not be so mingled, nor should we be forced to give so much study to disentangle a web of emotion and thought and memory, which, when we

have disentangled it, does not quite seem as if it were worth the trouble which we take.

But now matters change. The imagination in Shelley has been warmed by the work it has done, even though that work is inferior. He has also got rid of confusion, of side issues, of memories he thought right to introduce, of things he thought it best to conciliate. One thought alone remains now. It has emerged clear from all the rest and is their mistress. The moment Shelley grasps it and isolates it vividly, his imagination rushes into it alone; all his emotion collects around it, and the rest of the poem is as luminous as the previous part is obscure. It is with Shelley as with all artists who are worthy of the name—as emotion deepens clearness deepens.

“The day is come and thou wilt fly with me”

begins the close. (Shelley is alone—Mary, Emilia, all passed away—with the living image of his own soul in perfect peace, with his being of absolute Beauty. A splendid passage about love, closely knit, the metaphors hand in hand, introduces the new theme of his flight to the island with her who is the soul out of his soul. And then we possess the creation of the island of imagination, of himself as Love, of Emily as absolute Beauty, of their life with one another in absolute joy, of their imperishable union in passion. This is the vision to which all the rest has led. It is clear, simple, astonishingly bright in the sunlight of

thought, in the sunlight of feeling. It is realised to the smallest detail. The landscape is luminous, set in pellucid air, and is wholly at unity with itself. Every touch increases the impression, and I think it is the most beautiful thing—for pure beauty—which exists in English poetry. It is not sublime, it is not on the highest range of poetry, it is not of that primal emotion which redeems the heart from the world, but it is of an exquisite and solitary loveliness. (And it runs without a break in its beauty to a noble end, to a perfect climax—to that fine and spiritual reality of passion, which is, when it is pure of self, the last summit of human joy and peace to which we attain in life.)

NOTES.

The title of this Poem—*Epipsychidion*—is translated by Shelley himself in the line,

“Whither ’twas fled, *this soul out of my soul* ;”

and the word *Epipsychidion* is coined by him to express the idea of that line. It might mean something which is placed on a soul as if to complete or crown it. It was probably intended by Shelley to be also a diminutive of endearment from *epipsyche*. There is no such Greek word as ἐπι-ψυχή. But *epipsyche* would mean “a soul upon a soul,” just as *epicycle*, in the Ptolemaic astronomy, meant “a circle upon a circle.” Such “a soul on a soul” might be paraphrased as a soul which is the complement of, and therefore responsive to, another soul like itself, but in higher place and of a higher order. The lower would then seek to be united with the higher, because in such

union it would be made perfect, and the pre-established harmony between them be actually realised.

This idea, many suggestions of which may be found in Plato, runs through a great part of Shelley's personal
5 poetry, and the accomplishment of it is expressed near the end of *Epipsychidion* in the lines which begin

“One passion in two hearts.”

But perhaps the best commentary on the whole of this conception is the passage which I here extract from
10 Shelley's fragment *On Love* :—

“*Thou* demandest what is love? It is that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts
14 the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own,
20 that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own, that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best blood. This is Love. This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but
25 with everything which exists. We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the

instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness. It is probably in correspondence with this law that the infant drains milk from the bosom of its mother; this propensity develops itself with the development of our nature. We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise; the ideal prototype of everything excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed;¹ a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness; a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper paradise, which pain, and sorrow, and evil dare not overleap. To this we eagerly refer all sensations, thirsting that they should resemble or correspond with it. The discovery of its antitype; the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating our own; an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret; with a frame whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres, strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own; and of a combination of all these in such pro-

¹ These words are ineffectual and metaphorical. Most words are so. No help!

portion as the type within demands ; this is the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends ; and to attain which, it urges forth the powers of man to arrest the faintest shadow of that, without the possession of which
5 there is no rest nor respite to the heart over which it rules. Hence in solitude, or in that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings, and yet they sympathise not with us, we love the flowers, the grass, and the waters
11 and the sky. In the motion of the very leaves of spring
10 in the blue air, there is then found a secret correspondence with our heart. There is eloquence in the tongueless wind, and a melody in the flowing brooks and the rustling of the reeds beside them, which by their inconceivable relation to something within the soul, awaken the spirits
15 to a dance of breathless rapture, and bring tears of mysterious tenderness to the eyes, like the enthusiasm of patriotic success, or the voice of one beloved singing to you alone. Sterne says that if he were in a desert he would love some cypress. So soon as this want or
20 power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was."

The main motive of the Poem is again taken up and illustrated with different colouring and imagery in the
25 fable, *Una Favola*, of which Mr. Garnett made an ex-

cellent translation in his *Relics of Shelley*. That fable is dated 1820, but I should be inclined to conjecture from its peculiar note, and from its being written in Italian, that it was composed after Shelley's meeting with Emilia Viviani. At any rate, many of its images and expressions are repeated in *Epipsychidion* with natural differences. The obscure forest of Life, the allurements of Death, when despair falls on desire and Love has fled; the false images of Love; the rapture at meeting, after long seeking, with the unveiled reality of her who had always been veiled—these are all in *Epipsychidion*; nor are there wanting in the *Fable* certain analogies to *Alastor*.

Here is the fable in Mr. Garnett's translation:—

“There was a youth who travelled through distant lands, seeking throughout the world a lady of whom he was enamoured. And who this lady was, and how this youth became enamoured of her, and how and why the great love he bore her forsook him, are things worthy to be known by every gentle heart.

“At the dawn of the fifteenth spring of his life, a certain one calling himself Love awoke him, saying that one whom he had oftentimes beheld in his dreams abode awaiting him. This Love was accompanied by a great troop of female forms, all veiled in white, and crowned with laurel, ivy, and myrtle, garlanded and interwreathed with violets, roses, and lilies. They sang with such sweetness that perhaps the harmony of the spheres, to

which the stars dance, is not so sweet. And their manners and words were so alluring that the youth was enticed, and, arising from his couch, made himself ready to do all the pleasure of him who called himself Love; at whose behest he followed him by lonely ways and deserts and caverns, until the whole troop arrived at a solitary wood, in a gloomy valley between two most lofty mountains, which valley was planted in the manner of a labyrinth, with pines, cypresses, cedars, and yews, whose shadows begot a mixture of delight and sadness. And in this wood the youth for a whole year followed the uncertain footsteps of this his companion and guide, as the moon follows the earth, save that there was no change in him, and nourished by the fruit of a certain tree which grew in the midst of the labyrinth—a food sweet and bitter at once, which being cold as ice to the lips, appeared fire in the veins. The veiled figures were continually around him, ministers and attendants obedient to his least gesture, and messengers between him and Love, when Love might leave him for a little on his other errands. But these figures, albeit executing his every other command with swiftness, never would unveil themselves to him, although he anxiously besought them; one only excepted, whose name was Life, and who had the fame of a potent enchantress. She was tall of person and beautiful, cheerful and easy in her manners, and richly adorned, and, as it seemed from her ready unveiling of herself, she wished well to this youth.

But he soon perceived that she was more false than any Siren, for by her counsel Love abandoned him in this savage place, with only the company of these shrouded figures, who, by their obstinately remaining veiled, had always wrought him dread. And none can expound whether these figures were the spectres of his own dead thoughts, or the shadows of the living thoughts of Love. Then Life, haply ashamed of her deceit, concealed herself within the cavern of a certain sister of hers dwelling there; and Love, sighing, returned to his third heaven.

“Scarcely had Love departed, when the masked forms, released from his government, unveiled themselves before the astonished youth. And for many days these figures danced around him whithersoever he went, alternately mocking and threatening him; and in the night while he reposed they defiled in long and slow procession before his couch, each more hideous and terrible than the other. Their horrible aspect and loathsome figure so overcame his heart with sadness that the fair heaven, covered with that shadow, clothed itself in clouds before his eyes; and he wept so much that the herbs upon his path, fed with tears instead of dew, became pale and bowed like himself. Weary at length of this suffering, he came to the grot of the Sister of Life, herself also an enchantress, and found her sitting before a pale fire of perfumed wood, singing laments sweet in their melancholy, and weaving a white shroud, upon which his name was half wrought, with the

obscure and imperfect beginning of a certain other name; and he besought her to tell him her own, and she said, with a faint but sweet voice, 'Death.' And the youth said, 'O lovely Death, I pray thee to aid me against these hateful phantoms, companions of thy sister, which cease not to torment me.' And Death comforted him, and took his hand with a smile, and kissed his brow and cheek, so that every vein thrilled with joy and fear, and made him abide with her in a chamber of her cavern, whither, she said, it was against Destiny that the wicked companions of Life should ever come. The youth continually conversing with Death, and she, like-minded to a sister, caressing him and showing him every courtesy both in deed and word, he quickly became enamoured of her, and Life herself, far less any of her troop, seemed fair to him no longer; and his passion so overcame him that upon his knees he prayed Death to love him as he loved her, and consent to do his pleasure. But Death said, 'Audacious that thou art, with whose desire has Death ever complied? If thou lovedst me not, perchance I might love thee—beloved by thee, I hate thee and I fly thee.' Thus saying, she went forth from the cavern, and her dusky and ethereal form was soon lost amid the interwoven boughs of the forest.

"From that moment the youth pursued the track of Death; and so mighty was the love that led him that he had encircled the world and searched through all its regions, and many years were already spent, but sorrows

rather than years had blanched his locks and withered the flower of his beauty, when he found himself upon the confines of the very forest from which his wretched wanderings had begun. He cast himself upon the grass and wept for many hours, so blinded by his tears that for much time he did not perceive that not all that bathed his face and his bosom were his own, but that a lady bowed behind him wept for pity of his weeping. And lifting up his eyes he saw her, and it seemed to him never to have beheld so glorious a vision, and he doubted much whether she were a human creature. And his love of Death was suddenly changed into hate and suspicion, for this new love was so potent that it overcame every other thought. This compassionate lady at first loved him for mere pity; but love grew up swiftly with compassion, and she loved for Love's own sake, no one beloved by her having need of pity any more. This was the lady in whose quest Love had led the youth through that gloomy labyrinth of error and suffering, haply for that he esteemed him unworthy of so much glory, and perceived him too weak to support such exceeding joy. After having somewhat dried their tears, the twain walked together in that same forest, until Death stood before them, and said, 'Whilst, O youth, thou didst love me, I hated thee, and now that thou hatest me, I love thee, and wish so well to thee and thy bride that in my kingdom, which thou mayest call Paradise, I have set apart a chosen spot, where

ye may securely fulfil your happy loves.' And the lady, offended, and perchance somewhat jealous by reason of the past love of her spouse, turned her back upon Death, saying within herself, 'What would this lover of my husband who comes here to trouble us?' and cried, 'Life! Life!' and Life came, with a gay visage, crowned with a rainbow, and clad in a various mantle of chameleon skin; and Death went away weeping, and departing said with a sweet voice, 'Ye mistrust me, but I forgive ye, and await ye where ye needs must come, for I dwell with Love and Eternity, with whom the souls whose love is everlasting must hold communion; then will ye perceive whether I have deserved your distrust. Meanwhile I commend ye to Life; and, sister mine, I beseech thee, by the love of that Death with whom thou wert twin born, not to employ thy customary arts against these lovers, but content thee with the tribute thou hast already received of sighs and tears, which are thy wealth.' The youth, mindful of how great evil she had wrought him in that wood, mistrusted Life; but the lady, although she doubted, yet being jealous of Death, . . ."

There are several passages in Shelley's poems which illustrate the conceptions of Love and Beauty embodied in *Epipsychidion*. Rather than comment on them in my

own words, I place them here together, and each reader can collate them in his own mind, as he pleases.

"The grass in the warm sun did start and move,
The sea-buds burst beneath the waves serene ;
How many a one, though none be near to love,

"Loves then the shade of his own soul, half-seen
In any mirror—or the spring's young minions
The winged leaves amid the copses green."

"Thou art the wine whose drunkenness is all
We can desire, O Love ! and happy souls,
Ere from thy vine the leaves of autumn fall,

"Catch thee, and feed from their o'erflowing bowls
Thousands who thirst for thy ambrosial dew ;—
Thou art the radiance which where ocean rolls

"Investest it ; and when the heavens are blue
Thou fillest them ; and when the earth is fair
The shadow of thy moving wings imbue

"Its desarts and its mountains, till they wear
Beauty like some bright robe ;—thou ever soarest
Among the towers of men, and as soft air

"In spring, which moves the unawakened forest,
Clothing with leaves its branches bare and bleak,
Thou floatest among men ; and aye implorest

"That which from thee they should implore :—the weak
Alone kneel to thee, offering up the hearts
The strong have broken—yet where shall any seek

"A garment whom thou clothest not ?"

—*Prince Athanase.*

"I loved—oh no ! I mean not one of ye,
 Or any earthly one, though ye are dear
 As human heart to human heart may be ;
 I loved, I know not what. But this low sphere,
 And all that it contains, contains not thee,—
 Thou, whom seen nowhere, I feel everywhere.
 From heaven and earth, and all that in them are,
 Veiled art thou, like a (storm benighted ?) star

"By heaven and earth, from all whose shapes thou flowest
 Neither to be contained, delayed, nor hidden ;
 Making divine the loftiest and the lowest,
 When for a moment thou art not forbidden
 To live within the life which thou bestowest ;
 And leaving noblest things vacant and chidden,
 Cold as a corpse after the spirit's flight,
 Blank as the sun after the birth of night.

"In winds and trees and streams, and all things common ;
 In music, and the sweet unconscious tone
 Of animals, and voices which are human,
 Meant to express some feelings of their own ;
 In the soft motions and rare smile of woman ;
 In flowers and leaves ; and in the grass fresh-shown,
 Or dying in the autumn ; I the most
 Adore thee present, or lament thee lost."

—*The Zucca.*

The parallel passages in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* I have already spoken of. But there is a difference in one point between the two poems. The spells he speaks of in the *Hymn* bring before him the shadow of Beauty. The spells he murmurs in *Epipsychidion* are used to recover the sight of the shadow of her whom he has lost.

There is also a difference between *Alastor* and *Epipsy-
chidion*. The passionate union of his soul to the spirit of
Beauty is realised in *Alastor* at the beginning of his life, but
only realised in dream; and in the agony of the desire a-
wakened by this dream he roams over the world, seeking her
in vain, and dies. In *Epipsy-
chidion*, the search reaches its
goal, the dream is realised—union is accomplished at the
end of the poem. But it is only accomplished in imagina-
tion. He has not yet fled with Emily. But nevertheless
it is realised in hope; it is before him, not behind him
as it is in *Alastor*. Despair has departed from the poet.
He looks to life, not death. And though the poem
ends with a cry of failure, yet the epilogue is quiet and
firm. "I am Love's," he says at the very close. Nor is
he, like the poet in *Alastor*, alone, slain by his self-
chosen isolation. He is in *Epipsy-
chidion* at one with
others. "Marina, Vanna, Primus and the rest" are with
him. The spirit of the later is wholly different from that
of the earlier poem.

Nevertheless, even here, Shelley is, as I have said, con-
scious of the weakness of his overwrought imagination,
and no one should omit to compare the lines at the end,
beginning "Woe is me," with the extraordinary revelation
of his own character in the *Adonais*, every line of which
is weighty with self-knowledge, and the whole of which
supplies the best basis for the criticism of that part of
his life and poetry which was only personal.

XXXI.

“Midst others of less note, came one frail Form,
A phantom among men ; companionless
As the last cloud of an expiring storm
Whose thunder is its knell ; he, as I guess,
Had gazed on Nature’s naked loveliness,
Actæon-like, and now he fled astray
With feeble steps o’er the world’s wilderness,
And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey.

XXXII.

“A pardlike Spirit beautiful and swift—
A Love in desolation masked ;—a Power
Girt round with weakness ;—it can scarce uplift
The weight of the superincumbent hour ;
It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,
A breaking billow ;—even whilst we speak
Is it not broken ? On the withering flower
The killing sun smiles brightly : on a cheek
The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break.

XXXIII.

“His head was bound with pansies overblown,
And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue ;
And a light spear topped with a cypress cone,
Round whose rude shaft dark ivy tresses grew,
Yet dripping with the forest’s noonday dew,
Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
Shook the weak hand that grasped it ; of that crew
He came the last, neglected and apart ;
A herd-abandoned deer struck by the hunter’s dart.”

Lastly, I insert in the original the final verse of the first Canzone of Dante's *Convito*, Shelley's translation of which is placed as a Preface to *Epipsychidion*:

“Canzone, io credo che saranno radi
Color che tua ragione intendan bene,
Tanto lor parli faticoso e forte ;—
Onde, se per ventura egli addiviene,
Che tu dinanzi da persone vadi,
Che non ti pajan d'essa bene accorte ;
Allor ti priego che ti riconforte,
Dicendo lor, diletta mia novella :
Ponete mente almen, com'io son bella.”

STOPFORD A. BROOKE.



NOTE ON EPIPSYCHIDION

BY

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

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ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

THERE is but one point on which the *Epipsychidion* might be plausibly represented as open to attack. Its impalpable and ethereal philosophy of love and life does not prevent it from being "quite a justifiable sort of poem to write;" the questionable element in it is the apparent introduction of such merely personal allusions as can only perplex and irritate the patience and intelligence of a loyal student, while they may not impossibly afford an opening for preposterous and even offensive interpretations. In all poetry as in all religions, mysteries must have place, but riddles should find none. The high, sweet, mystic doctrine of this poem is apprehensible enough to all who look into it with purged eyes and listen with purged ears; but the passages in which the special experience of the writer

is thrust forward under the mask and muffler of allegoric rhapsody are not in any proper sense mysterious; they are simply puzzling; and art should have nothing to do with puzzles. This, and this alone, is the fault which in my opinion may be not unreasonably found with some few passages of the *Epipsychidion*; and a fault so slight and partial as merely to affect some few passages here and there, perceptible only in the byways and outskirts of the poem, can in no degree impair the divine perfection of its charm, the savour of its heavenly quality. By the depth and exaltation of its dominant idea, by the rapture of the music and the glory of the colour which clothe with sound and splendour the subtle and luminous body of its thought, by the harmony of its most passionate notes and the humanity of its most godlike raptures, it holds a foremost place in the works of that poet who has now for two generations ruled and moulded the hearts and minds of all among his countrymen to whom the love of poetry has been more than a fancy or a fashion; who has led them by the light of his faith, by the spell of his hope, by the fire of his love, on the way of thought which he himself had followed in the track of the greatest who had gone before him—of *Æschylus*, of *Lucretius*, of *Milton*; who has been more to us than ever was *Byron* to the youth of his own brief day, than ever was *Wordsworth* to the students of the day succeeding; and of whom,

whether we class him as second or as third among English poets, it must be in either case conceded that he holds the same rank in lyric as Shakespeare in dramatic poetry—supreme, and without a second of his race. I would not pit his name against the sacred name of Milton; to wrangle for the precedence of this immortal or of that can be but futile and injurious; it is enough that our country may count among her sons two of the greatest among those great poets who have been prophets and evangelists of personal and national, social and spiritual freedom; but it is equally certain that of all forms or kinds of poetry the two highest are the lyric and the dramatic, and that as clearly as the first place in the one rank is held among us by Shakespeare, the first place in the other is held and will never be resigned by Shelley. [From *Essays and Studies*, 1875, pp. 236-237.]

If any man of human ear can want further evidence than his own sense of harmony in support of the true and hitherto undisputed reading (of the line, "Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar," in Shelley's *Lament*), he may find one instance among others of the subtle and wonderful *use* to which Shelley would sometimes put a seeming imperfection of this kind in the verses to Emilia Viviani:

"Is it with thy kisses or thy tears?"

Here the same ineffable effect of indefinable sweetness is produced by an exact repetition (but let no aspiring "poet-ape" ever think to reproduce it by imitation) of the same simple means—the suppression, namely, of a single syllable. And I cannot but wonder as well as rejoice that no pedant whose ears are at the end of his fingers should ever yet have proposed to correct and complete the verse by reading

"Say, is it with thy kisses," &c.

A. C. SWINBURNE.

[From *Essays and Studies*, 1875, pp. 229-230.]

EPIPSYCHIDION

Price, 2s.

LONDON.
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SALISBURY-SQUARE.

EPIPSYCHIDION

VERSES ADDRESSED TO THE NOBLE

AND UNFORTUNATE LADY

EMILIA V———

NOW IMPRISONED IN THE CONVENT OF ——

L' anima amante si slancia fuori del creato, e si crea nel infinito
un Mondo tutto per essa, diverso assai da questo oscuro e pauroso
baratro.

HER OWN WORDS.

LONDON

C AND J OLLIER VERE STREET BOND STREET

MDCCCXXI.

ADVERTISEMENT

THE Writer of the following Lines died at Florence, as he was preparing for a voyage to one of the wildest of the Sporades, which he had bought, and where he had fitted up the ruins of an old building, and where it was his hope to have realised a scheme of life, suited perhaps to that happier and better world of which he is now an inhabitant, but hardly practicable in this. His life was singular ; less on account of the romantic vicissitudes which diversified it, than the ideal tinge which it received from his own character and feelings. The present Poem, like the Vita Nuova of Dante, is sufficiently intelligible to a certain class of readers without a matter-of-fact history of the circumstances to which it relates ; and to a certain other class it must ever remain incomprehensible, from a defect of a common organ of perception for the ideas of which it treats. Not but that, *gran vergogna sarebbe a colui, che rimasse cosa sotto veste di figura, o di colore rettorico : e domandato non sapesse denudare le sue parole da cotal veste, in guisa che avessero verace intendimento.*

The present poem appears to have been intended by the Writer as the dedication to some longer one. The stanza on the opposite page is almost a literal translation from Dante's famous Canzone

Voi, ch' intendendo, il terzo ciel movete, &c.

The presumptuous application of the concluding lines to his own composition will raise a smile at the expense of my unfortunate friend : be it a smile not of contempt, but pity.

S.

Dante's Convito (final verse, first Canzone).

My Song, I fear that thou wilt find but few
Who fitly shall conceive thy reasoning,
Of such hard matter dost thou entertain;
Whence, if by misadventure, chance should bring
Thee to base company, (as chance may do)
Quite unaware of what thou dost contain,
I prithee, comfort thy sweet self again,
My last delight! tell them that they are dull,
And bid them own that thou art beautiful.



EPIPSYCHIDION

SWEET Spirit ! Sister of that orphan one,
Whose empire is the name thou weepest on,
In my heart's temple I suspend to thee
These votive wreaths of withered memory.

Poor captive bird ! who, from thy narrow cage,
Pourest such music, that it might assuage
The rugged hearts of those who prisoned thee,
Were they not deaf to all sweet melody ;
This song shall be thy rose : its petals pale
Are dead, indeed, my adored Nightingale !
But soft and fragrant is the faded blossom,
And it has no thorn left to wound thy bosom.

High, spirit-winged Heart ! who dost for ever
Beat thine unfeeling bars with vain endeavour,
'Till those bright plumes of thought, in which arrayed
It over-soared this low and worldly shade,

Lie shattered ; and thy panting, wounded breast
Stains with dear blood its unmaternal nest !
I weep vain tears : blood would less bitter be,
Yet poured forth gladlier, could it profit thee.

Seraph of Heaven ! too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman
All that is insupportable in thee
Of light, and love, and immortality !
Sweet Benediction in the eternal Curse !
Veiled Glory of this lampless Universe !
Thou Moon beyond the clouds ! Thou living Form
Among the Dead ! Thou Star above the Storm !
Thou Wonder, and thou Beauty, and thou Terror !
Thou Harmony of Nature's art ! Thou Mirror
In whom, as in the splendour of the Sun,
All shapes look glorious which thou gazest on !
Ay, even the dim words which obscure thee now
Flash, lightning-like, with unaccustomed glow ;
I pray thee that thou blot from this sad song
All of its much mortality and wrong,
With those clear drops, which start like sacred dew
From the twin lights thy sweet soul darkens through,
Weeping, till sorrow becomes ecstasy :
Then smile on it, so that it may not die.

I never thought before my death to see
Youth's vision thus made perfect. Emily,
I love thee ; though the world by no thin name
Will hide that love, from its unvalued shame.
Would we two had been twins of the same mother !
Or, that the name my heart lent to another
Could be a sister's bond for her and thee ,
Blending two beams of one eternity !
Yet were one lawful and the other true,
These names, though dear, could paint not, as is due,
How beyond refuge I am thine. Ah me !
I am not thine : I am a part of *thee*.

Sweet Lamp ! my moth-like Muse has burnt its wings ;
Or, like a dying swan who soars and sings,
Young Love should teach Time, in his own grey style,
All that thou art. Art thou not void of guile,
A lovely soul formed to be blest and bless ?
A well of sealed and secret happiness,
Whose waters like blithe light and music are,
Vanquishing dissonance and gloom ? A Star
Which moves not in the moving Heavens, alone ?
A smile amid dark frowns ? a gentle tone
Amid rude voices ? a beloved light ?
A Solitude, a Refuge, a Delight ?
A lute, which those whom love has taught to play
Make music on, to soothe the roughest day

And lull fond grief asleep? a buried treasure?
A cradle of young thoughts of wingless pleasure?
A violet-shrouded grave of Woe?—I measure
The world of fancies, seeking one like thee,
And find—alas! mine own infirmity.

She met me, Stranger, upon life's rough way,
And lured me towards sweet Death; as Night by Day,
Winter by Spring, or Sorrow by swift Hope,
Led into light, life, peace. An antelope,
In the suspended impulse of its lightness,
Were less ethereally light: the brightness
Of her divinest presence trembles through
Her limbs, as underneath a cloud of dew
Embodied in the windless Heaven of June
Amid the splendour-winged stars, the Moon
Burns, inextinguishably beautiful:
And from her lips, as from a hyacinth full
Of honey-dew, a liquid murmur drops,
Killing the sense with passion; sweet as stops
Of planetary music heard in trance.
In her mild lights the starry spirits dance,
The sun-beams of those wells which ever leap
Under the lightnings of the soul—too deep
For the brief fathom-line of thought or sense.
The glory of her being, issuing thence,

Stains the dead, blank, cold air with a warm shade
Of unentangled intermixture, made
By Love, of light and motion : one intense
Diffusion, one serene Omnipresence,
Whose flowing outlines mingle in their flowing
Around her cheeks and utmost fingers glowing
With the unintermitted blood, which there
Quivers, (as in a fleece of snow-like air
The crimson pulse of living morning quiver,)
Continuously prolonged; and ending never,
Till they are lost, and in that Beauty furled
Which penetrates and clasps and fills the world;
Scarce visible from extreme loveliness.
Warm fragrance seems to fall from her light dress,
And her loose hair; and where some heavy tress
The air of her own speed has disentwined,
The sweetness seems to satiate the faint wind;
And in the soul a wild odour is felt,
Beyond the sense, like fiery dews that melt
Into the bosom of a frozen bud.—
See where she stands ! a mortal shape indued
With love and life and light and deity,
And motion which may change but cannot die;
An image of some bright Eternity;
A shadow of some golden dream; a Splendour
Leaving the third sphere pilotless; a tender

Reflection of the eternal Moon of Love
Under whose motions life's dull billows move ;
A Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning ;
A Vision like incarnate April, warning,
With smiles and tears, Frost the Anatomy
Into his summer grave.

Ah, woe is me !
What have I dared ? where am I lifted ? how
Shall I descend, and perish not ? I know
That Love makes all things equal : I have heard
By mine own heart this joyous truth averred :
The spirit of the worm beneath the sod
In love and worship, blends itself with God.

Spouse ! Sister ! Angel ! Pilot of the Fate
Whose course has been so starless ! O too late
Beloved ! O too soon adored, by me !
For in the fields of immortality
My spirit should at first have worshipped thine,
A divine presence in a place divine ;
Or should have moved beside it on this earth,
A shadow of that substance, from its birth ;
But not as now :—I love thee ; yes, I feel
That on the fountain of my heart a seal
Is set, to keep its waters pure and bright
For thee, since in those *tears* thou hast delight.

We—are we not formed, as notes of music are,
For one another, though dissimilar ;
Such difference without discord, as can make
Those sweetest sounds, in which all spirits shake
As trembling leaves in a continuous air ?

Thy wisdom speaks in me, and bids me dare
Beacon the rocks on which high hearts are wreckt.
I never was attached to that great sect,
Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
To cold oblivion, though it is in the code
Of modern morals, and the beaten road
Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread,
Who travel to their home among the dead
By the broad highway of the world, and so
With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe,
The dreariest and the longest journey go.

True Love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away.
Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
Gazing on many truths ; 'tis like thy light,
Imagination ! which from earth and sky,
And from the depths of human phantasy,

As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
The Universe with glorious beams, and kills
Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow
Of its reverberated lightning. Narrow
The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,
The life that wears, the spirit that creates
One object, and one form, and builds thereby
A sepulchre for its eternity.

Mind from its object differs most in this :
Evil from good ; misery from happiness ;
The baser from the nobler ; the impure
And frail, from what is clear and must endure.
If you divide suffering and dross, you may
Diminish till it is consumed away ;
If you divide pleasure and love and thought,
Each part exceeds the whole ; and we know not
How much, while any yet remains unshared,
Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared :
This truth is that deep well, whence sages draw
The unenvied light of hope ; the eternal law
By which those live, to whom this world of life
Is as a garden ravaged, and whose strife
Tills for the promise of a later birth
The wilderness of this Elysian earth.

There was a Being whom my spirit oft
Met on its visioned wanderings, far aloft,
In the clear golden prime of my youth's dawn,
Upon the fairy isles of sunny lawn,
Amid the enchanted mountains, and the caves
Of divine sleep, and on the air-like waves
Of wonder-level dream, whose tremulous floor
Paved her light steps ;—on an imagined shore,
Under the grey beak of some promontory
She met me, robed in such exceeding glory,
That I beheld her not. In solitudes
Her voice came to me through the whispering woods,
And from the fountains, and the odours deep
Of flowers, which, like lips murmuring in their sleep
Of the sweet kisses which had lulled them there,
Breathed but of *her* to the enamoured air ;
And from the breezes whether low or loud,
And from the rain of every passing cloud,
And from the singing of the summer-birds,
And from all sounds, all silence. In the words
Of antique verse and high romance,—in form
Sound, colour—in whatever checks that Storm
Which with the shattered present chokes the past ;
And in that best philosophy, whose taste
Makes this cold common hell, our life, a doom
As glorious as a fiery martyrdom ;
Her Spirit was the harmony of truth.—

Then, from the caverns of my dreamy youth
I sprang, as one sandalled with plumes of fire,
And towards the loadstar of my one desire,
I flitted, like a dizzy moth, whose flight
Is as a dead leaf's in the owlet light,
When it would seek in Hesper's setting sphere
A radiant death, a fiery sepulchre,
As if it were a lamp of earthly flame.—
But She, whom prayers or tears then could not tame,
Past, like a God throned on a winged planet,
Whose burning plumes to tenfold swiftness fan it,
Into the dreary cone of our life's shade ;
And as a man with mighty loss dismayed,
I would have followed, though the grave between
Yawned like a gulf whose spectres are unseen :
When a voice said :—" O Thou of hearts the weakest,
" The phantom is beside thee whom thou seekest."
Then I—" where ? " the world's echo answered " where ! "
And in that silence, and in my despair,
I questioned every tongueless wind that flew
Over my tower of mourning, if it knew
Whither 'twas fled, this soul out of my soul ;
And murmured names and spells which have controul
Over the sightless tyrants of our fate ;
But neither prayer nor verse could dissipate
The night which closed on her ; nor uncreate

That world within this Chaos, mine and me,
Of which she was the veiled Divinity,
The world I say of thoughts that worshipped her :
And therefore I went forth, with hope and fear
And every gentle passion sick to death,
Feeding my course with expectation's breath,
Into the wintry forest of our life ;
And struggling through its error with vain strife,
And stumbling in my weakness and my haste,
And half bewildered by new forms, I past
Seeking among those untaught foresters
If I could find one form resembling hers,
In which she might have masked herself from me.
There,—One, whose voice was venom'd melody
Sate by a well, under blue night-shade bowers ;
The breath of her false mouth was like faint flowers,
Her touch was as electric poison,—flame
Out of her looks into my vitals came,
And from her living cheeks and bosom flew
A killing air, which pierced like honey-dew
Into the core of my green heart, and lay
Upon its leaves ; until, as hair grown grey
O'er a young brow, they hid its unblown prime
With ruins of unseasonable time.

In many mortal forms I rashly sought
The shadow of that idol of my thought.
And some were fair—but beauty dies away :
Others were wise—but honeyed words betray :
And One was true—oh ! why not true to me ?
Then, as a hunted deer that could not flee,
I turned upon my thoughts, and stood at bay,
Wounded and weak and panting ; the cold day
Trembled, for pity of my strife and pain.
When, like a noon-day dawn, there shone again
Deliverance. One stood on my path who seemed
As like the glorious shape which I had dreamed,
As is the Moon, whose changes ever run
Into themselves, to the eternal Sun ;
The cold chaste Moon, the Queen of Heaven's bright isles,
Who makes all beautiful on which she smiles.
That wandering shrine of soft yet icy flame
Which ever is transformed, yet still the same,
And warms not but illumines. Young and fair
As the descended Spirit of that sphere,
She hid me, as the Moon may hide the night
From its own darkness, until all was bright
Between the Heaven and Earth of my calm mind,
And, as a cloud charioted by the wind,
She led me to a cave in that wild place,
And sate beside me, with her downward face

Illumining my slumbers, like the Moon
Waxing and waning o'er Endymion.
And I was laid asleep, spirit and limb,
And all my being became bright or dim
As the Moon's image in a summer sea,
According as she smiled or frowned on me ;
And there I lay, within a chaste cold bed :
Alas, I then was nor alive nor dead :—
For at her silver voice came Death and Life,
Unmindful each of their accustomed strife,
Masked like twin babes, a sister and a brother,
The wandering hopes of one abandoned mother,
And through the cavern without wings they flew,
And cried " Away, he is not of our crew."
I wept, and though it be a dream, I weep.

What storms then shook the ocean of my sleep,
Blotting that Moon, whose pale and waning lips
Then shrank as in the sickness of eclipse ;—
And how my soul was as a lampless sea,
And who was then its Tempest ; and when She,
The Planet of that hour, was quenched, what frost
Crept o'er those waters, 'till from coast to coast
The moving billows of my being fell
Into a death of ice, immoveable ;—
And then—what earthquakes made it gape and split,
The white Moon smiling all the while on it,

These words conceal :—If not, each word would be
The key of staunchless tears. Weep not for me !

At length, into the obscure Forest came
The Vision I had sought through grief and shame.
Athwart that wintry wilderness of thorns
Flashed from her motion splendour like the Morn's,
And from her presence life was radiated
Through the grey earth and branches bare and dead ;
So that her way was paved, and roofed above
With flowers as soft as thoughts of budding love ;
And music from her respiration spread
Like light,—all other sounds were penetrated
By the small, still, sweet spirit of that sound,
So that the savage winds hung mute around ;
And odours warm and fresh fell from her hair
Dissolving the dull cold in the froze air :
Soft as an Incarnation of the Sun,
When light is changed to love, this glorious One
Floated into the cavern where I lay,
And called my Spirit, and the dreaming clay
Was lifted by the thing that dreamed below
As smoke by fire, and in her beauty's glow
I stood, and felt the dawn of my long night
Was penetrating me with living light :
I knew it was the Vision veiled from me
So many years—that it was Emily.

Twin Spheres of light who rule this passive Earth,
This world of love, this *me*; and into birth
Awaken all its fruits and flowers, and dart
Magnetic might into its central heart;
And lift its billows and its mists, and guide
By everlasting laws, each wind and tide
To its fit cloud, and its appointed cave;
And lull its storms, each in the craggy grave
Which was its cradle, luring to faint bowers
The armies of the rain-bow-winged showers;
And, as those married lights, which from the towers
Of Heaven look forth and fold the wandering globe
In liquid sleep and splendour, as a robe;
And all their many-mingled influence blend,
If equal, yet unlike, to one sweet end;—
So ye, bright regents, with alternate sway
Govern my sphere of being, night and day!
Thou, not disdaining even a borrowed might;
Thou, not eclipsing a remoter light;
And, through the shadow of the seasons three,
From Spring to Autumn's sere maturity,
Light it into the Winter of the tomb,
Where it may ripen to a brighter bloom.
Thou too, O Comet beautiful and fierce,
Who drew the heart of this frail Universe
Towards thine own; till, wreckt in that convulsion,
Alternating attraction and repulsion,

Thine went astray and that was rent in twain ;
Oh, float into our azure heaven again !
Be there love's folding-star at thy return ;
The living Sun will feed thee from its urn
Of golden fire ; the Moon will veil her horn
In thy last smiles ; adoring Even and Morn
Will worship thee with incense of calm breath
And lights and shadows ; as the star of Death
And Birth is worshipped by those sisters wild
Called Hope and Fear—upon the heart are piled
Their offerings,—of this sacrifice divine
A World shall be the altar.

Lady mine,
Scorn not these flowers of thought, the fading birth
Which from its heart of hearts that plant puts forth
Whose fruit, made perfect by thy sunny eyes,
Will be as of the trees of Paradise.

The day is come, and thou wilt fly with me.
To whatsoe'er of dull mortality
Is mine, remain a vestal sister still ;
To the intense, the deep, the imperishable,
Not mine but me, henceforth be thou united
Even as a bride, delighting and delighted.
The hour is come :—the destined Star has risen
Which shall descend upon a vacant prison.

The walls are high, the gates are strong, thick set
The sentinels—but true love never yet
Was thus constrained : it overleaps all fence :
Like lightning, with invisible violence
Piercing its continents; like Heaven's free breath,
Which he who grasps can hold not; liker Death,
Who rides upon a thought, and makes his way
Through temple, tower, and palace, and the array
Of arms : more strength has Love than he or they ;
For it can burst his charnel, and make free
The limbs in chains, the heart in agony,
The soul in dust and chaos.

Emily,

A ship is floating in the harbour now,
A wind is hovering o'er the mountain's brow ;
There is a path on the sea's azure floor,
No keel has ever ploughed that path before ;
The halcyons brood around the foamless isles ;
The treacherous Ocean has forsworn its wiles ;
The merry mariners are bold and free :
Say, my heart's sister, wilt thou sail with me ?
Our bark is as an albatross, whose nest
Is a far Eden of the purple East ;
And we between her wings will sit, while Night
And Day, and Storm, and Calm, pursue their flight,

Our ministers, along the boundless Sea,
Treading each other's heels, unheededly.
It is an isle under Ionian skies,
Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise,
And, for the harbours are not safe and good,
This land would have remained a solitude
But for some pastoral people native there,
Who from the Elysian, clear, and golden air
Draw the last spirit of the age of gold,
Simple and spirited; innocent and bold.
The blue Ægean girds this chosen home,
With ever-changing sound and light and foam,
Kissing the sifted sands, and caverns hoar;
And all the winds wandering along the shore
Undulate with the undulating tide:
There are thick woods where sylvan forms abide;
And many a fountain, rivulet, and pond,
As clear as elemental diamond,
Or serene morning air; and far beyond,
The mossy tracks made by the goats and deer
(Which the rough shepherd treads but once a year,)
Pierce into glades, caverns, and bowers, and halls
Built round with ivy, which the waterfalls
Illumining, with sound that never fails
Accompany the noon-day nightingales;
And all the place is peopled with sweet airs;
The light clear element which the isle wears

Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers,
Which floats like mist laden with unseen showers,
And falls upon the eye-lids like faint sleep ;
And from the moss violets and jonquils peep,
And dart their arrowy odour through the brain
Till you might faint with that delicious pain.
And every motion, odour, beam, and tone,
With that deep music is in unison :
Which is a soul within the soul—they seem
Like echoes of an antenatal dream.—
It is an isle 'twixt Heaven, Air, Earth, and Sea,
Cradled, and hung in clear tranquillity ;
Bright as that wandering Eden Lucifer,
Washed by the soft blue Oceans of young air.
It is a favoured place. Famine or Blight,
Pestilence, War and Earthquake, never light
Upon its mountain-peaks ; blind vultures, they
Sail onward far upon their fatal way :
The winged storms, chaunting their thunder-psalm
To other lands, leave azure chasms of calm
Over this isle, or weep themselves in dew,
From which its fields and woods ever renew
Their green and golden immortality.
And from the sea there rise, and from the sky
There fall, clear exhalations, soft and bright,
Veil after veil, each hiding some delight,

Which Sun or Moon or zephyr draw aside,
Till the isle's beauty, like a naked bride
Glowing at once with love and loveliness,
Blushes and trembles at its own excess:
Yet, like a buried lamp, a Soul no less
Burns in the heart of this delicious isle,
An atom of th' Eternal, whose own smile
Unfolds itself, and may be felt not seen
O'er the grey rocks, blue waves, and forests green,
Filling their bare and void interstices.—
But the chief marvel of the wilderness
Is a lone dwelling, built by whom or how
None of the rustic island-people know:
'Tis not a tower of strength, though with its height
It overtops the woods; but, for delight,
Some wise and tender Ocean-King, ere crime
Had been invented, in the world's young prime,
Reared it, a wonder of that simple time,
An envy of the isles, a pleasure-house
Made sacred to his sister and his spouse.
It scarce seems now a wreck of human art,
But, as it were, Titanic; in the heart
Of Earth having assumed its form, then grown
Out of the mountains, from the living stone,
Lifting itself in caverns light and high:
For all the antique and learned imagery

Has been erased, and in the place of it
The ivy and the wild-vine interknit
The volumes of their many twining stems;
Parasite flowers illumine with dewy gems
The lampless halls, and when they fade, the sky
Peeps through their winter-woof of tracery
With Moon-light patches, or star atoms keen,
Or fragments of the day's intense serene;—
Working mosaic on their Parian floors.
And, day and night, aloof, from the high towers
And terraces, the Earth and Ocean seem
To sleep in one another's arms, and dream
Of waves, flowers, clouds, woods, rocks, and all that we
Read in their smiles, and call reality.

This isle and house are mine, and I have vowed
Thee to be lady of the solitude.—
And I have fitted up some chambers there
Looking towards the golden Eastern air,
And level with the living winds, which flow
Like waves above the living waves below.—
I have sent books and music there, and all
Those instruments with which high spirits call
The future from its cradle, and the past
Out of its grave, and make the present last
In thoughts and joys which sleep, but cannot die,
Folded within their own eternity.

Our simple life wants little, and true taste
Hires not the pale drudge Luxury, to waste
The scene it would adorn, and therefore still,
Nature, with all her children, haunts the hill.
The ring-dove, in the embowering ivy, yet
Keeps up her love-lament, and the owls flit
Round the evening tower, and the young stars glance
Between the quick bats in their twilight dance ;
The spotted deer bask in the fresh moon-light
Before our gate, and the slow, silent night
Is measured by the pants of their calm sleep.
Be this our home in life, and when years heap
Their withered hours, like leaves, on our decay,
Let us become the over-hanging day,
The living soul of this Elysian isle,
Conscious, inseparable, one. Meanwhile
We two will rise, and sit, and walk together,
Under the roof of blue Ionian weather,
And wander in the meadows, or ascend
The mossy mountains, where the blue heavens bend
With lightest winds, to touch their paramour ;
Or linger, where the pebble-paven shore,
Under the quick, faint kisses of the sea
Trembles and sparkles as with ecstasy,—
Possessing and possess by all that is
Within that calm circumference of bliss,

And by each other, till to love and live
Be one :—or, at the noontide hour, arrive
Where some old cavern hoar seems yet to keep
The moonlight of the expired night asleep,
Through which the awakened day can never peep ;
A veil for our seclusion, close as Night's,
Where secure sleep may kill thine innocent lights ;
Sleep, the fresh dew of languid love, the rain
Whose drops quench kisses till they burn again.
And we will talk, until thought's melody
Become too sweet for utterance, and it die
In words, to live again in looks, which dart
With thrilling tone into the voiceless heart,
Harmonizing silence without a sound.
Our breath shall intermix, our bosoms bound,
And our veins beat together ; and our lips
With other eloquence than words, eclipse
The soul that burns between them, and the wells
Which boil under our being's inmost cells,
The fountains of our deepest life, shall be
Confused in passion's golden purity,
As mountain-springs under the morning Sun.
We shall become the same, we shall be one
Spirit within two frames, oh ! wherefore two ?
One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grew,
'Till, like two meteors of expanding flame,
Those spheres instinct with it become the same,

Touch, mingle, are transfigured ; ever still
 Burning, yet ever inconsumable :
 In one another's substance finding food,
 Like flames too pure and light and unimbued
 To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,
 Which point to Heaven and cannot pass away :
 One hope within two wills, one will beneath
 Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
 One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
 And one annihilation. Woe is me !
 The winged words on which my soul would pierce
 Into the height of love's rare Universe,
 Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.—
 I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire !

Weak Verses, go, kneel at your Sovereign's feet,
 And say :—" We are the masters of thy slave ;
 "What wouldest thou with us and ours and thine ?"
 Then call your sisters from Oblivion's cave,
 All singing loud : " Love's very pain is sweet,
 "But its reward is in the world divine
 "Which, if not here, it builds beyond the grave."
 • So shall ye live when I am there. Then haste
 Over the hearts of men, until ye meet

Marina, Vanna, Primus, and the rest,
And bid them love each other and be blest :
And leave the troop which errs, and which reproves,
And come and be my guest,—for I am Love's.



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